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TESTIMONY OF THE
 BRIDGEPORT CHILD ADVOCACY COALITION
 TO THE
 JOINT PUBLIC HEARING
 OF THE
 INSURANCE AND REAL ESTATE COMMITTEE
 HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
 AND
 PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE

MARCH 2, 2009

Testimony of Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition
Before the General Assembly's Insurance and Real Estate, Human Services and
Public Health Committee

The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC) appreciates the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of HB 6600, An Act to Establish the Sustinet Plan, to the joint public hearing of the Insurance and Real Estate, Human Services and Public Health Committees of the 2009 General Assembly.

Rosita is a young widow with a 6-year-old daughter. This past spring, Rosita was laid off by AT&T after 10 years. In getting laid off, she also lost her employer-sponsored health insurance. Her daughter is eligible for HUSKY B. But Rosita's income from unemployment, \$450 a week, and death benefits that her daughter receives makes her over-income for HUSKY. COBRA would have cost her \$1,200 a month. She applied for Charter Oak but the premiums would have cost her \$200 a month, money she just doesn't have. So she has no health insurance.

Rosita has rheumatoid arthritis. She has not been to the doctor or taken her medications in six months. If you meet her, you will see her opening and closing her hands to keep her fingers from stiffening. She says, "I need to stay healthy to be there for my daughter. I am all she has." But without health insurance, Rosita is not able to stay healthy.

Rosita is one of four parents from Bridgeport who participated in an interview on the PBS program, 'The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer. Each story was as compelling as Rosita's -- parents who lost their jobs and their health benefits; each struggling to get by.

The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC) urges you to support Sustinet, the most comprehensive proposal for achieving affordable health coverage in Connecticut. Sustinet will help Rosita stay healthy at a price she can afford and give her peace of mind so she does not wake up at 2:00 in the morning wondering what she will do if she gets sick.

Sustinet will keep Connecticut's residents healthy by incentivizing prevention and helping those who have chronic conditions, like Rosita, manage them.

Sustinet will offer quality health care choices. Those who are satisfied with their current insurance can keep it. Those who have no insurance or are underinsured can participate in Sustinet.

Sustinet not only addresses coverage, but health care delivery, as well. The Sustinet plan will increase the reimbursement rates for doctors, providing a strong incentive for physician participation and thus offering consumers a choice of doctors and access to specialists. This will ensure that Rosita gets the medical care she needs.

Sustinet will provide affordable health care coverage to both the state and the consumer, with cost containment measures, including electronic medical records and evidenced-based practices.

SustiNet will cover Connecticut's residents regardless of pre-existing conditions, work status or marital status, giving peace of mind.

We urge you to support Sustinet on behalf of the many working parents we've met over the last two years from Stratford to Stamford who worry every night about losing their jobs and their benefits. And with the current economy, that fear is very real -- Bridgeport's unemployment rate jumped from 7% in December 2007 to 10% in December 2008. Fairfield's unemployment rate jumped from 3.5% to 5.1%. And it's only going to get worse.

We urge you to support Sustinet on behalf of the 160 small business owners we've met in Bridgeport, Stratford, Trumbull, Fairfield, Westport and Norwalk who struggle to provide health benefits for their employees - they know they need to offer health insurance to remain competitive, but by the time they pay their business insurance, mortgage and utilities, there is little left.

We urge you to support Sustinet so that Rosita, and the thousands of other Connecticut workers who have been lost their jobs through no fault of their own, and their health insurance, can have the health care they so desperately need.

Connecticut needs a comprehensive solution to our health care crisis. The state is spending far too much now -- \$22 billion each year and growing -- and we are getting far too little in return. This is the time to act. We urge you to be bold. Support major health care reform, not a piecemeal approach. Connecticut can lead the nation.

Connecticut needs a solution that will be good for our families and good for our economy. That solution is Sustinet.

We need Sustinet now. For those of us who are uninsured. For those of us who are underinsured and struggling to pay high costs of premiums and deductibles. For those of us with preexisting conditions. And for those of us, like Rosita, who worry everyday about what tomorrow will bring. We cannot wait any longer.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit our testimony.

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The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition is a coalition of more than 80 member organizations dedicated to improving the well-being of Bridgeport's children through research, advocacy, community education and mobilization.